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Mental Stressors in College

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SUNY – Buffalo State
International Center for Studies in Creativity

Mental Stressors in College

A Project
In Creative Studies
By
Matthew Captain

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Science

May 2018

Abstract of the Project

The purpose of this project is to show the effects of mental stresses in colleges and to show ways to help improve the situation I sent out a questionnaire on campus to try to gauge the level of need that is necessary for campus life. This was to be set up for students to help gain an understanding of campus life and the needs to relieve mental stresses. This was also set up to gain a better understanding of what is needed on campus and what could change on campus compared to other campuses that are currently running solid mental health programs and students on other campuses are happy with campus life.

Key Words: Mental health, stress, awareness, therapy, students

Date

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Dates of Approval

Project Advisor: J. Michael Fox

Candidate: Matthew Captain

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Signatory Page.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4-5
Section 1:	
Introduction.....	6
Description.....	7-9
Section 2:	
Effects of depression.....	10-11
Wellness in a support group.....	11-12
Therapy for students.....	12-13
Benefits of support groups.....	14-15
Effective support groups.....	15-16
Creativity influence mental illness.....	17-18
Section 3:	
About the survey.....	19-20
Summary of question one.....	20-21
Summary of question two.....	21-23
Summary of question three.....	23-24
Summary of question four.....	24-25
Summary of question five.....	26-27
Summary for question six.....	27-28
Summary for question seven.....	29-30
Summary for question eight.....	30-31
Summary for question nine.....	31
Summary for question ten.....	32-33
Section 4:	
Raising Awareness.....	33-37
Section 5:	

Conclusion.....	37-39
Section 6:	
References.....	40-41
Appendix A	
Further Readings.....	42
Appendix B	
Mental Stress Survey.....	43-44

Introduction

Throughout the course of this project I had been watching to accomplish establishing a foundation for a support group for those going through mental distress, whether it is from depression, anxiety, or anywhere in between. I hope that by setting this up it can help alleviate some of the stresses that individuals suffer from. During the time of developing my Master's Project I had working with student life on campus with the creation of a wellness program which I hope can be helpful in the creation of the program. I anticipate that it can help with what is lacking in a support group and help with mending those who are going through mental distress issues. By going further into the project, I want to see if setting up a group would be necessary, or if there is just the need to raise more awareness on campus about these issues. As I set this up I looked to gather data from students and faculty to see what kind of group would work best from both perspectives. I will cover some of what could be needed as a group on campus along with raising awareness on campus.

This has an impact on my own personal experiences as I have suffered from mental stressors while at Buffalo State College. When I was in my undergraduate, I suffered from depression. I have anxiety now and I feel like I had no help to get through it I think one part of it was I had really bad self-esteem issues and another part is I had just transferred from ECC. The program I was in at ECC had only 10-12 of us in the group. While I was going through this program I had felt like I was part of something. I had people I could go to about any issue and we all really got along. So, while I do want to create a setup that is built towards support and wellness, I hope with this group system that everyone can form a cohort and become friends out of this as they go forward because they have the stresses in common, but they can also find other things in common and become closer. In addition, as I was in the transition between ECC and

Buffalo State, I did not have a professor that I could go to with any issues even if I was not in their class. Even as I found a professor I began to realize they were not tough on me when I needed them to be and did not directly help me with certain issues I had been going through. I noticed that at Buffalo State I had become more of a number even though there is a friendlier atmosphere. Other students I had talked to had said something similar how they had felt out of place. Now where I am now, I acknowledge the help from others that I have I would hope others do not go into school and feel like just a number in the system. Looking at this it is important to understand how this has affected other students and if it has the same impact on them as it has had on myself. It is also important to get feedback from other students because this can help with setting up a support group and assisting future students so there are less stressors during their time in college.

Description

I have been looking into different types of therapy to put into the sessions because all people are different. For a therapy style to truly work, it depends on the person. I would not want half the people in the group to suffer because I like or prefer a therapy style while they would prefer another. There should be an equal balance within the group. In addition, looking at support groups, it should have an aspect that is engaging, along with part of it that is based more on communication or social issues. It maybe doing simple arts, meeting at a coffee shop once a month, or even going on a hike and exploring nature. Each group is different, so by just using cognitive therapy with a group can be difficult for a group, but it could also be beneficial for others. While trying to keep this as a group setting, there is the possibility of implementing something like art therapy in a group while also using cognitive therapy. This would have

benefits for the whole groups and it would be easier for everyone in the group to share their experiences.

I am looking to set up a support group that can be effective for those going through mental illnesses. By doing this, my focus now is at the college level. This is a transition time in a young adult's life and to go through something like this they should not have to feel like they are going through it alone. Now I have done some research and have found a site called *meetup.com* which is a site for anyone to form a group and to essentially meet up about anything. With this I found some groups based around depression and anxiety, though it was still rather vague, and some were lacking some details. I hope to do something like these and elaborate further on this idea since there are most like more people that are going through this that are less likely to step up and help one another. There should also be an aspect of wellness implemented into this group as with wellness makes up physical, mental, and social health. As this is important because all three aspects will be important for each other part and all of them of them are important for a healthy individual. Though at first, I am looking to do something like this at a college setting to help students who may be a little resistant to get active. This can help get them out and talking with others about what is going on. I am also watching to see that if this can become successful to try this at other colleges an implementing a system that can help students going through mental distress alleviate some of their issues. Before I go about doing this, I want to get opinions from students and teachers about what they would want to set up on campus. I have put together a survey to gather the data of what would work best for both students and faculty. By gathering this data, I would be able to use the data to gain a better understanding of what the campus feels it needs and what should be implemented on campus in terms of a support group. Something of note to look at as I gather data from others, is how to increase awareness for

others and what the campus body would want to see in something like this. Looking forward into this program, I hope to build a foundation where those suffering from mental health issues will become comfortable with others in the group and start building a foundation of safety in a sense and begin to build a beginning wellness with others. Though this would be a group setting, I would hope that the group is able to learn more about the importance of self-care and the mindfulness it takes to implement self-care in one's daily life. Or maybe there is a need for different therapies in the group to help the group feel comfortable. There may just be the possibility of finding everyone's strong suit and developing them even further through the group, because sometimes we can be very self-critical of ourselves and we cannot see our strengths, while others will.

Looking Further

Considering depression and other mental illnesses, there is much concern for the havoc it can bring to an individual. As this does look at types of therapies and is mainly focused on college life the premise is still there to use any of this in most life settings, whether it is work or personal life. Setting up therapy or a support group can be helpful to anyone and help them grow as a person. By going through this, it can be difficult to try and find a place or someone to talk to about this. As you go through this, you feel like you are very alone which can be something that stems into depression or anxiety. In this part of the paper I will spend some time covering therapy such as art therapy and cognitive therapy. For most of this paper I will be focusing on support groups and how they are effective for those going through depression and other mental illnesses. I will be doing an in-depth search of support groups to see how they differ. For example, there are internet groups, peer-to-peer groups and a site that runs meetups that can run a hybrid group. By having a support group to help with depression, it can alleviate some of the issues, as many of the members of the group will have gone through similar problems making it easier for the group to share with each other.

What kind of affects does depression have on an individual?

Looking at depression it can be defined as a wicked problem because it is an issue that is so large it is very hard to pinpoint one definable solution. Although there are many solutions that can help alleviate the problem, it depends on the person. There is also the issue of there is not only a lack of a solution, but a lack of a way to measure the issue — which makes this issue so wicked. With a problem this large would it be possible for a support group to be put together and help with many of these problems. Within a support group you would have individuals who will have different personalities and will be able to help each other in different ways. In addition,

looking at a support group this would be like having a way to test different therapies to see what works best with certain individuals. Looking at this at a college level 26% of young adults between 18-24 will become mentally ill. In addition, 50% will have a need for care at one point while they are in college. Depression in an individual can be very subtle. In scientific terms for anyone that goes through depression, this is when your serotonin levels drop and stay low. It can show in their writing and speech patterns and they would not even realize it. For example, depressed or previously depressed individuals will use the word “I” and negative connotations in their speech patterns, while non-depressed individuals will use less of this. There is also the idea of Cognitive Vulnerability to depression where the individual can become more susceptible to negative information or dysfunctional beliefs that can have a poor impact on an individual (Gortner 2010). There is the Hopelessness Theory that explains if one were to experience a negative life event then this would build into a hopelessness depression. This would infer that an individual would be flawed or worthless from the event. The college years are an important transmission period for young adults to learn about who they are. By the age of 24 is when most people will develop a mental disorder. Being in college can be difficult at this time trying to understand what is going on and how to cope with their problems. In recent years according to the National College Health Assessment more than one in three students had reported to “feel so depressed it was difficult to function”. In an additional survey from 26 colleges there had been 17% of students reporting positive for depression and 9% reporting major depression (Hunt, 2010).

Can wellness be implemented in a support group?

Looking at wellness it is the physical, mental, and social well-being of an individual. Linking wellness with a support group, it should include a way to improve these

aspects in an individual. Within a college setting social well-being influences many students as many students are now on the internet which has made them more isolated and out of touch with the world around them. It is also important to understand that a student's wellness comes at an interpersonal and intrapersonal level. Each interpersonal development comes from outside influences. Intrapersonal development comes from within and influences emotions. By looking at an evaluation of both types of development there is a clear difference between the two. When looking at interpersonal development over the course of the evaluation, 42% of the time participants were able to identify the creative idea. While looking at intrapersonal development it had been roughly half of that. This shows that those going through any mental stressors will see the change or be able to identify the start in themselves before seeing any type of change in others. By keeping these in good working order, it can help with mental health especially during the college years of a young adult. These each have an influence on each other for if one of the were to suffer than an individual's mental health will suffer. During student's time in college 52% of them reported higher levels of stress. This has been linked to unhealthy eating habits or poor exercise. In addition to this 33% of these students said that it effected their academic success. Along with this 60 % of these students also stated that they drank more than they intended. It is also reported that 44% of students exercise 3 out of 7 days a week. Along with other factors that come along with other mental stressors it is important to identify healthy eating habits, exercise, and factors in causes of this (Mann, 2004). With forming these groups, they would want some time to identify healthy ways to go about this. As this could be a potential issue in a group and would be a good topic to see what others thought about it. It is important to acknowledge the factor that self-esteem plays with an individual. If a person suffers with lower self-esteem, then their personal mental and social wellness will struggle. It is important to

acknowledge that by building a person's self-esteem you want to make sure it has a lasting effect outside of the group. By helping a person with their wellness especially one that is suffering with low self-esteem they can be very fragile. There should be a form of wellness in a support group that will help an individual understand how to change their perspective about their way of thinking. As for low self-esteem it can lead to mental distress and several different mental disorders. By being part of a support group, it can help improve the situation because others can help improve your way of thinking and help you understand that the way of thinking can have a bad influence on themselves.

Can therapy be an option for students?

When looking at the student as an individual, it is important to understand that mental illness starts at a personal level. While understanding it important to know that everyone is different If an individual were to try and use therapy not every type would be successful. In recent years there have been more options for those going through mental disorders than just sitting one-on-one with a counselor. There is cognitive therapy, group sessions, and even art therapy. Most of this part paper covers the impacts of group sessions and the effects it has. Even though mental disorders are universal, looking at them at a larger scope there is no universal answer to the problem, so it is good to understand other aspects of the problem. First, there is cognitive therapy which is used to assist individuals focus on the present and help change thought processes through problem solving. For people that go through cognitive therapy, it is seen to be as effective as taking anti-depressants that help with serotonin levels. This had shown to be true with those with non-bipolar depression. College students struggle with making friends and many even show struggles of mental disorders. One effective way to help cope with this is through cognitive therapy. This is also helpful for college students that struggle with internet

dependence. By using cognitive therapy, it is shown to be helpful to replace the negative thoughts with more positive thoughts. One way to go about this is through written form, where this gets the individual to share the stressors of a traumatic event by themselves before they would share it with the group. This is helpful for someone going through depression as the thoughts that go through an individual's head will most likely occur first over the mood itself. By itself cognitive therapy has shown to be most successful with those going through mild to moderate depression. Treat severe depression with cognitive therapy, and for it to be successful, an individual may also need the proper anti-depressants for it to be successful. By going through this therapy, it helps to adjust the individual's perception of how they think and to help recreate a better perception of their thought process (Rupke 2006). Second, there is art therapy which involves the encouragement of self-expression through an art form such as painting, drawing, or even music. This is used as a remedial activity or to aid in the diagnosis. This had started as assistance for children, though some years later as it showed how it had results it started to begin to be used with mentally ill patients. Art therapy is looked at to be relaxing and soothing for an individual. In addition to this, it is noted that art therapy can be helpful for those who lack verbal communication and are able to create their emotions in a non-threatening way. Art therapy is a good form of non-verbal communication for those who may be a bit lacking in verbal communication. In addition, it is a good opportunity for self-exploration to help an individual learn more about some underlying issues with themselves. Though by looking at art therapy on its own it has shown to show a reduction in psychological trauma within the individual. One important thing to look at would be to identify how this would work in a group setting and how effective it would be at a large scale instead of an individual scale (Pizarro, 2004).

The benefits of using support groups

By looking at a support group as a social structure this helps alleviate some of the stressors of opening up to people you do not know. With this type of structure in mind, especially looking at those going through mental stress, this group should be built to help enhance the well-being of each individual. With this and any other therapy, it looks to reduce the effects of the traumatic exposure and increase psychological and health benefits. Though one of the best ways to help with the reduction of trauma in an individual's life is through improving one's communication. This does not necessarily need to be through verbal or writing. It can be by communicating how the individual is feeling through an art form. If one were to write as a type of therapy, it could help with the resolution of a stressful event and reduce the triggers caused by the event. This can help in a group setting as it would help the individuals feel more comfortable in sharing their emotions if they were to write them out beforehand, as they may feel less judged.

Though this also looks at a retention rate of keeping individuals involved in the program and from being exposed to these issues. There is also the aspect of setting up a support group for those going through mental illnesses. This can be very helpful for the group because by being a part of these groups it allows you to share what you have gone through with others that have gone through similar experiences. This gives the group a sense of comfort as everyone know that everyone in the group has experienced something similar. There is the idea that mental illness can foster creativity. While spending time in a support group this would give time for individuals to learn from each other on how to understand their creative skills and use them to the best of their ability. At the same time for others creativity may also bring out mental illness, so for those going through both ends of the spectrum it is good to understand everyone in the group and to be

able to help each other in the way they are going to need it. Along these lines many individuals who will go through a traumatic event will want to cope with someone who has gone through a similar experience. Thus, if a support group is set up in the correct way it can be beneficial to everyone as they will be able to assist each other through the process. This allows the group to help each other through what they're going through instead of one person trying to accomplish this. By being part of a support group, it has been made easier now with technology as there can be virtual groups, which still does not take away from the gathering support groups. In addition, by going the way of the support group this has limited to no cost on the individual and can put a whole new perspective on the situation rather than through self-help.

How can support groups be effective with mental illness?

It has been acknowledged that those that have suffered from traumatic experiences show higher levels of mental distress. By considering support groups, they have changed over the years and can be effective for those that are going through similar problems. (Pizarro 2004)

There are different types of support groups that can be helpful for individuals going through mental distress. These groups include virtual support groups, peer-to-peer groups, and a meetup style that is more casual compared to the other two. There is the introduction of virtual support groups which have proven to be good for empowerment of everyone. The empowerment had shown outcomes in such ways of being better informed and enhanced social well-being. Looking deeper into support groups there are virtual groups and peer-to-peer groups. Though as of recently peer-to-peer groups have shown to be more effective among those in the groups. This may be a factor of the internet groups just starting to gain traction. Though both groups look like the number of people that are supportive of the groups are low. This may be because of the number of people engaging in each session, with peer-to-peer sessions only about 10% of the

members are engaging, while in internet groups it is closer to 5%. When an individual is going through a time of emotional or mental distress it has been noted that they will turn for support from family or close family who they feel are natural helpers. This has been termed as social support as it acknowledges outside help that is close to the individual. This can be helpful for an individual in an organized support group because if everyone in the group has that sense that everyone is there to help each other, then there can be progress made in the group and it would be lasting as there would be bonds made within the group (Crabtree 2010). Social support in itself is less structured and not as developed as any other support group. Though if put together with a support group setting it leaves room for it to grow and build a promising support structure. What if the group focused on wellness instead of focusing on the illness? By starting a support group, it should have the idea that yes everyone is suffering from some sort of mental illness, though they are there for assistance and looking to others who are going through similar problems for the solution. Within a group it should have the idea to promote wellness and self-care for everyone. This should be a group that has an impact on everyone where it starts showing results outside of meetings. In addition to this, if it is necessary to run both peer-to-peer meetings and internet-based meetings so it can make it easier if certain individuals need further assistance. Using art therapy as a medium for the support group because it has been shown that those who will spend time writing do not show any improvement in health or reduce stress. While working with art shows an improvement in health over time.

How does creativity influence mental illness?

Mental illness can be affected by creativity, as does creativity have an effect on mental illness. By looking at creativity the four P's each show a different impact they have on mental illness. Mel Rhodes had first made mention of the four P's in 1961 during his research of

creativity. The four P's are broken down into press, person, product, and process. Though the two that would have a bigger impact would be press (environment) and person. It has been shown that those suffering from mental illnesses do show some aspect of creativity. Though there had been a study to show whether or not creativity has been linked to writers and the impacts they have. The study had focused on cultural influence and how much the individual was eminent. There is whether or not it has an effect on writers. It has shown that female poets going through mental illness will suffer more than other female writers. The study had shown that of all the professions that those in more of a writing background seemed to show more mental illness than those in any other profession (Sussman 2007). Though it has also been stated that great writing can be done without mental illness and the other way around. In the writing profession it does depend on the individual because you can have very successful writers who show no sign of mental illness. With creativity it should start with the cognitive process as this is more focused on an individual and their ability to generate ideas. It is important to identify cognitive behavior in a group setting as every individual will behave differently. Though it is good to have cognitive therapy in a session it should not be used all the time as it could cause conflict between individuals. There is also an idea based on the dual coding theory that suggests for an individual instead of just focusing on one form of stimuli use both word and visual stimuli. This has been shown to improve creativity and idea generation. If this were used in a group setting it would assist with setting goals and help with self-care, along with mindfulness (Malaga 2000). This also adds the effect that you are using more than one of your senses when may get you to think in a different perspective. There is also the perspective that the environment has an effect not only on an individual's creativity, it can also influence a person's mental wellness. There are all the extrinsic factors that play a role on an individual. The individual it may hinder them and lead

them to be less creativity. Though there are other stressors like major life events that can influence a person's life in either direction. However, with major life events this has the potential to sway a person either way on the creativity scale, it depends on the person.

About the Survey

I have set up a questionnaire for students and faculty on campus. With this questionnaire I gained more information on what students and faculty need and could use on campus to help with mental stress issues. The survey attempts to find what students and faculty feel is necessary for improving the well-being of college life. As I sent my questionnaire out to my sample size of students and faculty I am looking to see if there is a correlation in any types of stressors in college life in the first two years of college and the rest of college. Along with this I want to see if any mental stressors correlate with dropout rates and how these may be reduced.

Looking at college students in their sophomore year is a big transition year. As this year is when most student will decide their major and become more focused on what they want to do. While this can have a burden on some students as they may not be sure yet as of what they want to do and will start looking forward to graduation and worrying about starting a career after school. While there are many students that go through the burden of mental stressors, this leads to junior year having the highest rate of dropouts of any year of college. While many students will go through a time of random exploration during their first year of college, if they cannot break out of this by their second year of college, it may lead to some decisions that could potentially be bad for an individual. As a student needs that time for reflection to make the important decisions about themselves and what they feel to be important for them. Though as students did make the transition into focused exploration many that were in this stage of their life began to get frustrated with the decisions they had made during the time they were in their

random exploration phase. Looking at this how much do these stressors effect students rates of dropping out during college and do these stressors lead to mental stressors?

This questionnaire is also setup to get feedback from faculty. As all campus life is important and it is important to help all aspects of campus life. I hope by getting a viewpoint from faculty, mainly from teachers this will provide a wholistic approach on how to improve the stressors of campus life. There is the thought that teachers may be struggling from mental issues and this could affect their teaching abilities and then would affect students' performance. By looking at this I am hoping to get good feedback from students and try to understand if there are any real issues on campus and what would be a good solution to this problem. By trying to get feedback from others I want to see what students think about the issue of mental illness. but I am also looking into increase mental health on campus.

Results

The survey that I created was given to a sample of students at Buffalo State either through me giving them individually to students or by giving them to a few individual classes. When I did give them away individually, I did have a folder set up for that purpose so I could put them into it and set it aside, with the hopes of keeping the survey as anonymous as possible. I had spent some time breaking down the responses to the questions. Below shows my observations of what the overall responses looked like:

Q1) What year are you currently in?

Freshman- Of the surveys I had given out 26 of the surveys taken were freshmen. Overall this made up of 18.3% of the students taking the survey.

Sophomore- I had given out 25 surveys out to sophomores. This group made up of 17.6% of the students that took the survey.

Junior- I had given 41 surveys out to the juniors. This had made up of 28.8% of the students taking the survey.

Senior- I had given 41 surveys out to the seniors. This had made up of 28.8% of the students taking the survey.

Graduate student- Of all the surveys I gave out 6 of them were given to grad students. This made up of 4.2% of everyone that had taken the survey.

Faculty- I had 1 faculty member take the survey. The one faculty member I had taken this only made up of 0.7% of everyone that had taken the survey.

Other- There were also two others on campus that had taken the survey. These two made up of 1.4% of everyone that had taken the survey.

Looking into who took the survey I had a total of 144 people take the survey. I had collected either through handing them out individually or by asking teachers to hand them out in class. Of all the surveys juniors and seniors made up of just over 50% of the surveys taken.

Q2) How would you describe your college experience so far?:

For the most part people responded with having a good experience or it has been a relatively stressful experience. There has also been a mixture of responses going in between. Of everyone that took the survey no one responded by saying they had a horrible time during their college experience. Overall students had said their college experience had been great or at least

good so far and have learned a lot during their time in college. There had been a group of students that had said that their college experience had been rather boring up to this point. Looking at the sample size and the results of it, it shows that many of the seniors that took the survey had a good experience in college and throughout the experience had also said that it was relatively stressful. There was a large group of students that had said their experience was great or at least a good experience and many of the students said that they had learned a lot during their time here. There was also a portion of the students that said their college experience had been rather boring. To break this down and narrow down specific answers each class seemed to respond a little different.

The freshman had a split in their responses though nothing that was too extreme. There were some that had said their first year was good and had been enjoyable, while there were some that had said it was stressful and had be alright. Through all the freshman that had taken the survey none of them had said that they had a bad experience as of yet.

The sophomores in the sample size showed that many of them are enjoying their time in school so far and seem to be hopeful going further with their college experience. There had also been a large group of students that had said it has been stressful.

Looking at the results for the juniors it seemed to show that they were the most hesitant of their college experience and showed the highest results of going through a stressful time at college. Though at the same time juniors did respond by saying their experience was good and they had it had helped expand who they are. Though there were some that had said that they were enjoying their time and weren't quite getting what they wanted out of the experience.

Looking at seniors they referred to it as an overall good experience, some had referred to it as a rollercoaster experience, while there was a mixture that referred to it as stressful, but still enjoyable. There had been some seniors that had stated that their experience had been bad, but nothing horrible.

Of everyone else that had taken the survey, which this had mostly consisted of grad students. Most everyone within this group had said it was a good experience or it had been a stressful time while in college.

Q3) Is there anything that would help your situation on campus?:

While this question had seemed to show some varied results from every group. Some of the answers included better parking on campus, more help from faculty/staff, better class selection, keeping activity programs, and increase mental health awareness. There had also been some responses that had been less helpful. Some of the responses just consisted of “no”, along with suggestions relate towards food. Though these are less helpful because they do not help with expanding college life for everyone else. In addition, the food on campus probably is a relative issue because it is something that a lot of students complain about during their time here. Though this question did seem to show that it was a bit to open ended. Going forward when I work on another survey this may need to be a question that needs to be reworked just a bit. There had been an answer that had stuck out over all of them which was, “No, I feel that my situation is unique to me and has taught me a lot.” This quote makes me think and realize that this is more or less what everyone should be taking out of college and it is how to accomplish this that is the issue. Now to look at the results based on each class.

Freshman generally responded by saying that they did not have anything to improve on campus. Though those that did have an input had said to improve the activities, having more places to study or relax, and improve the ways to find help on campus.

While the sophomores had responded by saying there was nothing that could really improve their situation on campus. Though this could still be from some of them have transitioned well and are having a good experience. There had been some that had said to have a better outreach on campus. Along with this they had thought that food needed to be improved on campus.

The juniors had varied with their answers by stating nothing would help their situation, there should be more advisors on campus, in addition to this students did recommend having anonymous talk centers on campus. In addition, they had made mention to improve the parking on campus.

The seniors had responded by saying that parking should be improved on campus, improve the campus programs, and to improve advising for students. There had also been the suggestion to improve advising and to have better communication with teachers. In addition, they also mentioned fixing the food on campus.

The group of others that had taken the survey had responded by saying there was nothing that would improve their current situation. There had been some that had said to improve the dorming and parking situation on campus. Also, it was suggested to improve the groups and help centers on campus.

Q4) What do you feel or think are the right services on campus for not only addressing mental illness needs but for helping the student achieve success? If there are do you feel or think they are made aware to the students?:

For this question I had noticed that there was a large group of students that were unsure of any services on campus or there would be nothing helpful for student. There had also been a group of students that had recommended the counseling center. In addition, students also made reference to the tutoring center and academic services that could be helpful. There had also been a group that had made the recommendation to increase awareness about mental health on campus. This should be taken into consideration as many of the students that responded were unaware of anything on campus. In addition, looking at this question it seemed to work very well and was able to get its point across as it did get the feedback that I had been looking for. Though looking forward it could be change a little it would always depend on who I'm giving the survey to. There had also been some responses that had stuck out and seemed to be important. One of which was to include more fun activities or programs and don't attach the stigma of mental illness to them. Another would be to include more quiet places on campus to relax and destress. There had also been the thought of having a week dedicated to mental health and/or having seminars that would help educate students and faculty about the effects of mental illness.

Though freshman were more optimistic when I was looking at their answers. There were some that were unaware of any services on campus. In addition, there were some that had recommended the health center and to increase awareness on campus.

While sophomores had also responded by saying that they were unaware of any services on campus that would be of assistance. Though there were some that had mentioned that they thought the awareness on campus looked good.

Looking at the results based on each class the seniors had mentioned the counseling center and the health center on campus. In addition, they had mentioned including more activities on campus.

While juniors had responded by saying that they were unaware of any services on campus. Also, they had made mention that there needs to be more advertising on campus for these services, so students know more about these services. Also, there could also be more activities on campus and to promote the health center more. There had also been the idea to have a mandatory psychology class to help improve students understanding of mental illness.

The others had stated to utilize the counseling center and to raise more awareness on campus. Though there had also been some students that had suggested to improve awareness on campus. Along with this it was also suggested to improve group sessions and improve one-on-one sessions as well.

Q5) What on campus do you feel or think increases mental stressors?:

For this question I had noticed that many students had answered that stressors included, having mid-terms at the same time, and having too many assignments due at one time has had an affect on them. There were also those that had mentioned that loud events that are disturbing or even holding them in the wrong location. There had also been some that took the survey that felt that classes themselves had increased their stress levels. This question had seemed to match what I was looking for out of the survey as many of the answers were similar and most of the answers had matched what I had been looking for out of the survey. After looking through this question it did seem like it was well understood by everyone taking the survey.

Looking at the classes responses the freshman had answered the question by saying that the workload and classes have an impact on increasing stressors. Also, large amounts of people and the noise on campus can lead to an increase of stressors on campus.

The sophomores had also said that the workload, due dates being so close together, and noise in certain parts of campus played an impact on the stressors. In addition, they had said that professors not being understanding, and trying to apply for classes led to an increase in stressors. They had also mentioned how there are students that can be loud and the campus is too small for the amount of students that go here, along with parking increasing stressors for students.

The juniors had responded by saying some of them felt nothing had an increase on their stress on campus. While there had been some that had said that technology issues, an excessive amount of assignments, and the noise in certain parts of campus had increased their stress levels.

The seniors had responded by saying having assignments due in a short time frame, relationships that have been strained over a long period of time, and other various distractions that happen throughout the campus.

The groups of others that had taken the surveys had responded similarly to everyone else by saying the workload can lead to an increase in stressors.

Q6) What would help reduce these stressors?:

Overall students responded to this question in several different ways, while there were some that did not have a response to the question. While there were many suggestions that consisted of extending deadlines or reducing the amount of assignments. It was also suggested to

make it easier to reach out and talk to others about certain issues. It was also suggested to improve the food on campus as well. Though there was a group of students that did not have a response for this question. There was a group of students to suggest more activities for students on campus that would help with stress relief. In addition, there had been a group of students to suggest having more workshops on campus, whether they be for stress relief or more for getting the students ready for outside the classroom. There had also been the suggestion to fix the fire alarm, especially in the library, and fixing how many times the alarm does go off. Some students had also suggested better professors that are more understanding and more willing to help their students. It had also been suggested to have more quiet spots on campus to go to relax or to study. It had also been suggested to have more time for self-care or more time management.

Freshman had responded to this question by finding ways to improve personal time management and to improve communication with professors.

Sophomores had responded by saying, improve the way classes are structured and to reposition due dates. In addition, there were some that had said to work more on better time management. They had also suggested to improve the food on campus and to have more places to go on campus to relax and get away from any stressors.

Juniors had suggested to increase campus activities and to add more study areas. Along with this improve the study areas that are there already. In addition to this make improvements towards self-care. There were some that were unsure of anything that would help in reducing stressors. While there were some that had suggested talking to friends or someone that is willing to help.

Seniors had responded by saying improve the activities on campus that would be beneficial to students and to increase time or assistance on assignments.

The others had said to include more de-stressing programs and more relaxing places to go on campus.

Q7) Do you find it easier or harder to reach out to teachers when you are going through a harder time and need help? What would help with this?:

Looking through the surveys it seemed to be a split of students finding it easier or harder to reach out to teachers. For the most part it seemed to be linked with communication on both sides. There had also been some students that had said it does depend on the teacher. While some students had stated that teachers do not do a good enough job of announcing their office hours. Though there had been a group of students that did not respond to the question and were unsure of how to respond to the question. Also, some students said it was also depending on the situation that they were going through at the time. Those who had said it was easy to talk with their teacher had said being close with a certain teacher helps. Also, there were those that had said their teachers are more available and easy to reach out to.

Freshman had answered the question by saying, communication has been an issue and that it does depend on the professor. While there were some that were unsure or felt that nothing would help.

Sophomores had also noticed that it does depend on the professor and that there are some professors that are just not compassionate and do not relate to the students at all. In addition, seemed to lean more on how its easier to reach out and how it would depend on their situation.

Juniors when they responded to the question were split on it being easier or harder. Those that said it was harder felt that teachers would not understand what they are going through. There had also been some that had said it depends on the teacher.

While seniors generally looked found it to be a harder time to reach out to teachers. The main reason for it being communication between teachers and the students. There had also been some students that had answered by saying it would depend on the situation or even the teacher they would be trying to talk to. There had been some that had felt they were unsure if anything would help.

While the others had said it was mostly harder to communicate with their teachers and communication had been a big thing in this group.

Q8) What do you feel would be the best type of therapy for those going through any type of mental stressors?:

The students responses to this question seemed to show similarities among them. A lot of the responses seemed to show therapy dogs, being able to open up to someone, and having better food would help in reducing the stress. Other suggestions that were mentioned were having nap pods, having other types of therapy such as art therapy, or even going shopping. Even meditation and yoga were mentioned for students. There had also been a group of students that were unsure of any types of therapies that would help reduce stressors on campus. There had also been a group that had made the suggestion for more therapy dogs on campus to help with stress. Some of the more formal therapies that students had suggested to help were cognitive behavioral therapy, art therapy, and general counseling to give someone to talk to while they are going through a hard

time. Some other ways to relive stressors were exercise, meditation, and more activities on campus. In addition, having more time to relax and being able to talk through the issues.

Freshman had responded to the question by saying, being able to find someone to talk to that you trust or to talk to your advisor about certain issues. There were some that had said dog therapy and to increase the amount of dogs on campus. There had also been some that had said to increase or improve the activities that are on campus.

Sophomores had said the best therapies would be going on walks, talking to someone, having a pet as comfort, or even food as comfort. They had also made the suggestion to try several different types of therapies.

Juniors had a lot of variety to this question compared to other classes. Their responses included talking to someone or joining a discussion group, having dogs around, aromatherapy, and just more time for ones-self to just relax.

Seniors had responded to this question by saying meditation, general therapy, and having chill out rooms in each building would help with creating new types of therapy.

The others mainly made the suggestion to increase or improve the activities that are on campus.

Q9) Is there a group on campus that you feel would be successful in alleviating mental issues and stressors?

For this question it had seemed pretty consistent among all of the students that they did not know of any groups that would help with this issue. Though there were some students that

had some ideas on the matter. There had also been a group of students that had suggested going to a counselor or to go over to the health center for assistance. It had also been suggested to find a group on campus that the individual would enjoy. This would lead them to find people that share common interests and that would be easier to relate to.

Freshman had suggested joining a group or joining an activity on campus.

Sophomores had responded by saying study groups or even Christian groups on campus. They had also said they were also unsure of any groups that would be helpful in this situation.

Juniors had responded by suggesting the Weigel center or even trying to get involved in different clubs on campus.

Seniors suggested to try different clubs and to raise awareness on campus. They had also suggested to try finding assistance at Weigel and to bring back ActiveMinds.

While the group of others had made the suggestion to try the counseling center or to try different clubs on campus.

Q10) Are there any other Suggestions you feel would help with this issue?:

Of the responses from everyone many of them responded that they did not have any further responses for the survey. Though there was a group of students that had responded by making more awareness of mental health on campus. It was expected that there would be a large group of students that did not have a response as it was created as a more optional question to see if there is anything else they needed to go in more detail about. Also, it was suggested to advertise the groups on campus better so the students know more about them know where to find them on campus. In addition, it was suggested to just have more groups on campus so that

students can feel like that they have more options to choose from on campus. It was also suggested to improve communication between students, teachers, and advisors. There was also the suggestion to improve the activities that are on campus and have more a variety of activities that would help students destress.

Freshman had suggested more opportunities to seek help and classes that will help educate others on the damage that mental illness can do.

Juniors had suggested to raise awareness on campus and increase the access to the groups on campus.

Seniors suggested to raise awareness on campus and to lower the stigma that is surrounding mental health.

Raising Awareness

As I have gone through the responses from the surveys and done further analysis, I have noticed that at Buffalo State the amount of focus on mental health is lacking. There is less awareness to the students about the help that is present on campus already. In addition, there is the possibility for growth with mental health on campus. The campus can improve student life and how the effectiveness of mental health reaches the students.

This leads to the thought that maybe on campus at Buffalo State there does not need a new group to help with mental illness right away. Though maybe there just needs to be a heightened sense of awareness on campus. This had been noticed in the surveys as many of the results had shown that there needs to be more awareness on campus. This could lead to students

and faculty finding something on campus easier and will know that there is something there to be assistance. Along with this is the campus becomes more aware of what is there to help those going through mental health maybe there won't be a need for a new group. If there is a large number at the campus that becomes aware of what is available for mental health and still feel that there needs to be a change then that would be when there should be an implementation of a new program that would be of assistance to students and faculty.

On campus there is a counseling center and services that are linked with it. Though with this service it is hard to see any type of awareness on campus. Looking at this situation I personally was unaware of the counseling center until I was working on my Master's degree. There is an issue of making mental health more aware on campus, so students are more aware of these issues and they can feel less like they are going through these issues alone. This also helps show students that there are others about their problems and others on campus will be there to try and help. In addition, as I went there, there are programs that the counseling center is running just if you are not in the counseling center then you really won't be aware of these programs.

For a short time at Buffalo State there had been a group on campus known as ActiveMinds which worked with others going through mental distress. Though ActiveMinds is a national organization it was able to come to Buffalo State for a short amount of time. What it does is help empower students on the topic of mental health. In addition, it helps student members discuss mental health through peer-to-peer outreach. It had even set up a mental health week on campus that had included speakers that had known the struggles of mental illness and had other talks to raise awareness on campus. ActiveMinds had been on campus between 2010 and 2014, if it had been around longer it may have been able grow further as and raise more

awareness on campus. This also could have led to decreasing the stigma that is circulating around mental health.

This group does not need to be brought back on campus, although it would help with mental awareness. It would also help in breaking the stigma. There just needs to be a way to break the stigma on campus to alleviate some of the stresses on campus. For example, even just creating a mental health week on campus would help show how to reduce stressors for each individual and how everyone is going to handle everything in a different way. There is also a lot this can be expanded upon besides just having a week to cover the stigmas of mental health. There can be new things set up on campus such as meditation rooms or even quiet areas just to relax and destress. There can be more therapy dogs included on campus throughout the semester which would give students a few minutes to forget about the stresses in their life. Even just by creating more awareness on campus about groups that already exist. The counseling center can promote more events outside of the counseling center to help reduce the stigma of going there and the issues that surround mental illness. Even simple promotions like putting up more flyers around campus and giving a quick talk at the beginning of classes about certain upcoming events.

Looking further into awareness of this issue it is fully recognized in many countries around the world. For example, in the UK there is a whole week dedicated to raising the awareness of mental issues. This is held every year in May. Each year there are different topics that are covered throughout the week. In this year's main topic that will drive the week it will cover the impact of stress and what are the ways to reduce it. This will cover everything from what stress is and how it affects us every day. In addition to this in the UK there is also a week dedicated to awareness in the US as well. This week for awareness is held the first week of

October every year and has been in place since 1990. While in the US their focus for this year is to cover several different mental conditions and the effects that they truly have. It also will go over anything about each condition that would be untrue about it.

While it seems to be lacking at Buffalo State, and even students notice what is happening, there are other schools across the country that are making a difference in mental health. For example, the University of West Virginia had recently been awarded by the Jed Foundation for its comprehensive mental health programming. As there is generally a financial benefit of promoting counseling services, because if you are able to retain two students going through a mentally hard time, it would pay for one counselor that would be able to help the students. Promotion plays a large role in being able to retain students.

There are many schools that get involved to help the students with and stressors. For example, at the University of Maryland it is a smoke free campus. Along with this there are nutritious meals served on campus that are less than 1,400 calories. The menus are put together by student nutrition interns. It also has an outdoor adventure program, along with a *Student Health 101* magazine. These are definitely strides in the right direction to create better campus life for students as it definitely gets them involved and helps them grow as a college. (Krastas 2014)

Another college that shows great improvement on helping students with mental stressors is Virginia Tech. In the Princeton Review it was voted as having the best campus food. It contains two separate dining programs, one of which is the *You're Eating (and Living) Smarter (Y.E.S.)* and the *Farm and Fields Program*. Both of these programs are designed to help students eat healthier. There are also 21 to-go food choices on campus, along with healthy choices for better eating on campus. There is also a Health Education Awareness Team that does public

outreach events and workshops to help students understand better about eating habits, sleeping, and sexual behaviors. (Krastas 2014)

Among the top of all colleges in helping students with mental health is Rice University. It has been rated number one on Princeton's Review with the happiest college students. Even its dining services are reviewed as culinary excellence. It has many programs that are part of its schedule to help students ease through college life. It has programs like Mind&Body, S.W.E.A.T., and Pilates Reformer to help students. There is also the wellness center on campus to help students stay fit. Rice is also rank high in intramural sports, by offering more activities to the students that are sports related. (Krastas 2014)

Many of the top colleges had excellent programs related to mental health that would engage and educate students on the issues this can cause. In addition, many of them are smoke-free campuses, with some of them having designated areas to smoke. Another factor that was a big part of it was the food as many of the top colleges would be in the top of having excellent food. These colleges combine all these factors and can create an environment that is able to make the students welcome and happy to go to these colleges.

Conclusion

Looking at this the survey that I gave to everyone was successful. Though I did not get the response I was exactly looking for, but I did find information that was very useful. This survey helped me realize that there does need to be more awareness on campus. Which may or may not lead to my intended purpose of this project to start a support group. As I went through this project I had learned a lot about putting together a survey and how to diagnose the results.

Though this survey had been successful in finding something that would be needed to help improve campus life. It was the first time I had put a survey like this together and I had learned a lot about making improvements going forward. In addition, this survey can be modified slightly to fit into any type of environment. This survey did help identify that there is not much awareness on campus, so there could be a follow up questionnaire to see what would raise awareness on campus and what specifically would help students go through school with as little stress as possible.

What this project has done is open the door for several possibilities, one of which is raising awareness of what is on campus. If more awareness is raised and there are less students that are suffering from mental illness, but there is still a group of students that cannot find a niche in a specific group. Then there may need to be more research to see if there needs to be another group for students. Now this group has many potentials as one could be set up for commuters, so they feel more involved in campus life and do not feel so isolated while they go to school.

Looking into the answers that were received from the surveys many students had said the food at Buffalo State is disappointing and many think that the food needs to improve. While looking further at it, other colleges that are doing well in mental wellness also do well in providing quality food to their students. Looking into this the question is how students feel the food at Buffalo State should be improved. Also, is the food on campus related to the mental health of students on campus. There is the opportunity to survey students to see what they would want to see improved with food. In this survey it could also see if there is a correlation between the food served to students and their mental health. There is an opportunity to see what other foods students want to help improve it.

I was not hoping to find an answer directly to the solution of helping students go through mental stressors. By doing this I hope to spark the thought process of others and help others realize what needs to be done to help students going forward. As I gathered data I realized I could have done a handful of other surveys based on the results. One being on awareness and what would have been the most effective way to raise awareness on campus based on the students' perspectives. Maybe even by continuing doing these surveys for a few semesters this begins to gain traction of many of the programs on campus.

Examining the responses to the surveys has led to several different thoughts. The main issue would be raising awareness on campus and how this can be less of an issue on campus. In addition, what other types of therapies can be utilized by either the counseling center or the school in general. There may not need to be any other types of therapy if the counseling center is able to promote some of the programs it has more often. Though one of the bigger types of therapy suggested was to have more dogs on campus throughout the semester. It had also been suggested to improve the food on campus by many of the students, as many of them feel that it is an issue. Along with this students had suggested to improve class functionality, like improve the due dates and have them spread out throughout the semester more. Also, students suggested med-terms and finals to be spread out across more dates.

This survey has helped show that there is room to grow on campus, especially compared to other campuses and what they are doing. Though what has made them so successful and in what ways can Buffalo State and other colleges replicate these results? Would it be possible for other colleges to see what is happening and use these results and create something better for their students? This may need a few more surveys to see what students really need to improve their college life and how it would continue through their whole college life.

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Appendix A

This part consists of further readings it may be readings that I included in the master's project or just readings that I found interesting that I did not get to include.

- <http://theweek.com/articles/580547/what-successful-university-mental-health-program-looks-like>
- <https://www.greatvaluecolleges.net/30-great-schools-promoting-healthy-living-on-campus/>
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Appendix B

This part is the survey that I had given to the students on campus. It was the same survey given to everyone to ensure that answers were similar to each other.

College Mental Stress Survey

1) What year are you currently in?

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Graduate student
- ☐ faculty
- ☐ Other

2) How would you describe your college experience so far?:

3) Is there anything that would help your situation on campus?:

4) What do you feel or think are the right services on campus for not only addressing mental illness needs but for helping the student achieve success? If there are do you feel or think they are made aware to the students?:

5) What on campus do you feel or think increases mental stressors?:

6) What would help reduce these stressors?:

7) Do you find it easier or harder to reach out to teachers when you are going through a harder time and need help? What would help with this?:

8) What do you feel would be the best type of therapy for those going through any type of mental stressors?:

9) Is there a group on campus that you feel would be successful in alleviating mental issues and stressors?

10) Are there any other Suggestions you feel would help with this issue?: